

Full Length Research Paper

Policy Brief on Status of Drugs and Substance Abuse among Primary School Pupils in Kenya

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Submitted: 27th April 2020, Published: 30th June 2020

Executive Summary

Studies in Kenya indicate that drugs and substance abuse among young people in learning institutions is a growing social and public health problem. Most of these studies have, however, focused on young persons who are in high school or in higher levels of education (or older than 14 years). This presents a challenge as drug and substance abuse may begin at an earlier age. This scenario has resulted in limited evidence on drugs and substance abuse among primary school pupils. This survey therefore endeavors to assess the level of knowledge, attitudes and use of drugs and substances of abuse among primary school pupils in Kenya.

Introduction

Drugs and substance abuse is a growing socio-economic challenge that affects many societies across the globe. The challenge has particularly adversely impacted on young persons, families and communities. Some of the social effects of drug use and substance abuse include: emotional damage, antisocial behaviour, brain damage, and death. Economically, drugs impact adversely on individual productivity, leads to dependence and exacerbate poverty. Abuse of drugs and substances is associated with declines in consumption of essential goods and services such as education and health. Consequently, drug use and substance abuse tend to hamper attainment of development goals.

At the school level, use of drugs and substances of abuse among pupils impacts education processes and outcomes negatively. Drugs and substances of abuse is associated with poor academic performance, class repetition and may result in increased school dropout rates. The effects of drugs and substances of abuse on academic performance may be through several channels, including its negative impacts on overall health and cognitive ability. As an example, long term consumption of alcohol can lead to lowered levels of mental or physical function. Drugs and substances of abuse has also

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been associated with non-conducive learning environments. Pupils abusing drugs are more likely to engage in activities that disrupt learning, such as violent behaviour and arson—resulting in damage and or loss of assets and lives. Drugs and substances are also known to result in low self-esteem and, on aggregate, impact negatively on the quality of education delivery and attainment. Drug use may also increase risky sexual behaviours, leading to increased exposure to HIV/AIDs and other sexually transmitted diseases.

Despite the growing demand for data, there have been studies on the status and prevalence of drugs and substances of abuse and its association with risk factors among primary school pupils. Previous studies have targeted older cohorts and more so those in high schools, colleges and universities. As a result, there has been limited evidence on knowledge of learners, especially primary school pupils, about drug use and substance abuse. Little is known about primary school pupils: age for first drug experimentation, prevalence, drug refusal skills, assertiveness, self-control and influence of parenting on drug use and substance abuse.

As a result of these gaps, the Authority conducted a survey to determine the prevalence, knowledge, attitudes and practices of drugs and substances of abuse among primary school pupils. The objective of the study of were: examine the knowledge and attitudes of drugs and substance abuse among primary school pupils in Kenya; evaluate the extent of availability and access to drugs and substances of abuse among primary school pupils in Kenya; determine the prevalence of drugs and substance abuse among primary school pupils in Kenya; document the risks and protective factors associated with drugs and substances of abuse among primary school pupils in Kenya; and establish the extent of drug refusal skills, assertiveness skills, relaxations skills, self-control skills, and influence of parenting skills among primary school going age pupils.

Findings

The survey found out that the pupils are fairly knowledgeable on the different drugs and substances of abuse. Tobacco, alcohol and bhang/cannabis were the most widely known drugs with a prevalence of 89.3%, 83.8% and 77.8%, respectively. The drugs and substances of abuse reported as most readily available to primary school pupils were tobacco (41.9%), prescription drugs (27.8%), alcohol (25.9%) and miraa/ muguka (23.1%).

When asked if they were aware that their school mates and friends were abusing drugs and substances of abuse, the findings show that tobacco (16.0%), prescription drugs (13.8%), miraa/muguka (10.6%) and alcohol (9.6%) had the highest proportion of pupils reporting in the affirmative.

The pupils were also asked to mention the period when drugs and substances of abuse were being used in schools. Data showed that drugs and substances of abuse were more likely to be used during school holidays (30.0%); on their way home from school (22.0%); during weekends (21.0%); and during inter-school competitions (20.0%).

The pupils were also asked to mention the possible sources of drugs and substances of abuse. The most mentioned sources of drugs and substances of abuse included kiosks or shops near school (28.6%), bar near school (25.7%), friends (19.3%), bought from other pupils (13.7%), and school workers (13.6%).

The assessment also sought to determine the median age of onset of various drugs and substances of abuse. From the study, the average median age of onset of at least one drug or substance of abuse was 11 years while lowest reported age of onset to drugs and substances of abuse was 4 years.

The pupils were asked to mention the drugs and other substances of abuse that they have ever used in their lifetime (ever use). The study showed that 20.2 per cent of primary school pupils have ever used at least one drug or substance of abuse in their lifetime, 10.4 per cent have ever used prescription drugs in their lifetime, 7.2 per cent have ever used alcohol in their lifetime, 6.0 per cent have ever used tobacco in their lifetime, 3.7 per cent have ever used miraa/ muguka in their lifetime and 1.2 per cent have ever used bhang/ cannabis in their lifetime.

The pupils were also asked to mention the drugs and other substances of abuse that they have used in the last 30 days (current use). The results showed that 16.9 per cent of primary school pupils were currently using at least one drug or substance of abuse, 7.2 per cent were currently using prescription drugs, 3.2 per cent were currently using tobacco, 2.6 per cent were currently using alcohol, 2.3 per cent were currently using miraa/ muguka, 1.2 per cent were currently using inhalants and 1.2 per cent were currently using heroin. Current use of bhang/cannabis and cocaine among primary school pupils was less than 1.0 per cent.

The survey also showed that drugs and substance abuse was significantly associated with class repetition and decline in academic performance. The data also shows that pupils who use at least one drug or substance of abuse are 18 per cent more likely to repeat a class. This study also found that substance abuse was associated with a 6.4 per cent decline in academic performance. Further, the study sought to determine risk factors associated with drugs and substance abuse among primary school pupils in Kenya. The findings showed that pupils from families where one or both parents/guardians use drugs or substances of abuse were more likely to use drugs or substances of abuse; pupils with knowledge of a friend or schoolmate who was using drugs or substances of abuse were more likely to use drugs or substances of abuse; pupils who were accompanying parents to events where alcohol or any drug was being served were more likely to use drugs or substances of abuse; and pupils who reported that alcohol was available in their homes were more likely to use drugs or substances of abuse.

Policy Recommendations

Tackling drug and substance abuse in the country should include a comprehensive collaborative approach involving both state and non-state actors key among them NACADA, County Governments, Ministry of Health; Ministry of Education; parents and guardians. The survey recommended the following policy implications:

- i. Sensitization on knowledge of drugs and substances of abuse and their potential harmful effects. There is need for enhanced antismoking and anti-drinking attitudes especially at the lower grades of classes five and six - to counter their relatively higher admiration of users of drugs and substance of abuse:
- ii. Enforce guidelines on establishment/ construction of structures (including business premises) near schools;
- iii. Enforce ban on sale of cigarettes in single sticks;
- iv. Sensitize parents/guardians on the risks of: keeping drugs at home; being accompanied to drug consumption facilities by underage children; and involving children in sale of drugs;
- v. There is need to device programmes to be commensurate with the median age for first time use of drugs and substances of abuse. Further, parents, school management, teachers and faith based programmes should be incorporated in such interventions;

- vi. There is need to strengthen life skills among children to promote abstinence and delaying of drugs and substance abuse and in particular the assertiveness and refusal skills;
- vii. Streamlining the policy environment in schools by promoting institutional based drugs and substance abuse prevention policies and initiatives; and
- viii. Set up or kick start or support functional guidance and counselling departments with well trained teachers. This shall include provision of a counselling room and as well as establishment of sobriety clubs.